

PROJECT REPORT

Feedback on ARC Project Activities

Pacific Island TB Nurses Network Meetings

Each month the ARC Nurse Consultants meet online with the National TB Program (NTP) Staff of the US Affiliated Pacific Islands (USAPI) and the Division of TB Elimination at the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to present cases, discuss clinical issues, undertake educational activities and progress the development of NTP tools and resources. The monthly meetings are coordinated by ARC and hosted by the CDC. Each of the countries within the USAPI actively participate in the meetings and present cases for clinical discussion and review. The number of people attending the meetings within the countries increased over the year which is pleasing as the network continues to expand.

The ARC Nurse Consultants Group provide ongoing technical support, educational sessions and mentoring for the nurses and outreach workers of the USAPI TB Programs. The CDC provide funding for ARC to undertake these activities and support for the USAPIs.

Development of Information, Education and Communication Resources – TB Sputum Toolkit

Work continued on the development of the Sputum Toolkit for the TB Programs of the Northern Pacific this year. Collecting good quality specimens is essential for the diagnosis of people with TB and for monitoring a response to treatment and cure. The ARC Nurse Consultants Group has been working with the nurses from the USAPI and the CDC to develop the Toolkit.

The toolkit is made up of a series of resources that combined support clinical practice, training for health care workers and patient education. The resources include: a flipchart; health care worker training resources; guidelines and policies; competency standards and skill sets for nurses and a patient education resource.

In-country field testing and evaluation of the toolkit was to be completed in 2020, however, redeployment of USAPI staff to pandemic preparedness activities meant that there was a delay in completing the field testing in some of the countries. Work on the toolkit will be finalised in the first quarter of 2021.



Development of the Graduate Diploma/Master of Nursing (TB Management) Course

In 2020, ARC collaborated with the Western Sydney University, School of Nursing and Midwifery to develop and implement the Graduate Diploma/Master of Nursing (TB Management) Course. The course, the first of its kind internationally is seen as an important opportunity to further develop the speciality of TB nursing within Australia and enhance national efforts towards TB elimination. Nurses comprise the largest proportion of the Australian TB Program workforce, they are at the forefront of TB services and activities in Australia. Investing in education and skills development will enable TB Nurses of the future to further develop and implement effective TB programs. A strong training pathway will attract new nurses to the role and set the national TB program up for the future.

Kerrie Shaw was seconded to ARC to work on developing the three specialist units for the course: the Clinical Management of TB, the Public Health Management of TB and Care of People with TB units of study. ARC acknowledges Kerrie's expertise and outstanding contribution to the development and implementation of the course through academic writing and providing support for the students through the teaching team. Kerrie was assisted in this role by the ARC Nurse Consultants Group and a National Jurisdictional Reference Group.

In 2020, two of the three specialist units were available to students with four students completing the Clinical Management of TB unit of study and six students completing the Public Health management of TB unit of study. In 2021, all three units will be available for enrolment, there are currently 15 students enrolled in the Clinical Management of TB unit and 24 students enrolled in the Care and People with TB. The third unit, the Public Health Management of TB will be offered in mid-2021 with enrolments yet to commence.

In the coming year, ARC will meet with Western Sydney University, School of Nursing and Midwifery and other stakeholders to discuss opportunities to explore and scope the potential to offer the course internationally, and further develop workshops/stand alone courses that will increase access to tertiary learning in the speciality area of TB. Students from Australia and the Indo-Pacific Region are currently enrolled in the course. There is, however, capacity to identify opportunities to create a pathway and pipeline for nursing education that links other training and education activities that ARC is undertaking in the Pacific into an academic framework.

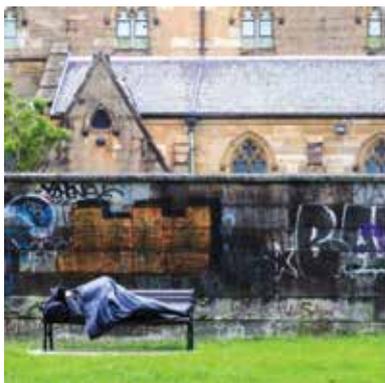
Funding to support the one-off course development costs were contributed from ARC and the Ministries of Health/Health Departments from New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia.

Homeless and Vulnerable Grant

Over the past two years, ARC with the financial support of the Bowlers Club of NSW Ltd has implemented a project to support homeless and vulnerable people with TB within the Greater Sydney metropolitan

area. Through this project ARC is able to provide funding for people experiencing financial hardship, which was particularly important this year as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was felt by many in the community.

In 2020, ARC was pleased to be able to provide eight grants to six people affected by TB. The financial support was used to contribute to the costs associated with accommodation, food and transport (to attend medical appointments). The grants recognise the benefits to individuals and community of caring for our most vulnerable during a difficult period in their life.



Homelessness in Australia is a significant social issue, that can have a long-term impact on individuals and families. Homelessness is complex issue, with each person having a different pathway into homelessness, it is often the end point of a series of life events and crisis. Homeless people often have a poor general health status, coexistent substance and mental health issues, limited financial resources and support networks in the community.

The initial management of the homeless with TB is through admission to hospital. For others, homelessness or housing difficulties may arise as a consequence of TB. Some individuals whose disease is considered infectious or who may be unwell, may also require hospitalisation for extended periods of time. This may have consequences for their employment and subsequently render them unemployed and homeless. Increases in the cost of living in Sydney and the casualisation of the workforce further contributes to this trend for people affected by TB.

Difficulties can also arise when the person is to be discharged from hospital to complete treatment in the community. The path to cure from TB is long and slow, people require treatment for six to twenty-four months. Discharging people to live in unstable settings is extremely problematic with many people defaulting from treatment and becoming lost to follow up. This poses a threat to the individual for reactivation of disease, development of drug resistant TB or death, and for the community this scenario can lead to ongoing transmission of TB. Providing ongoing care and support within this context is extremely challenging for both the individual and those that care for them, including the health care team.

The ARC is pleased to be able to continue to work in partnership with The Bowlers Club of NSW Ltd on this project as support for homeless and vulnerable people with TB is an important issue. It is planned in future years to extend the project nationally to provide much needed support for homeless and vulnerable people across Australia.

IMPACT OF COVID ON ARC'S PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Annual Pacific Island TB Controllers Association (PITCA)

Annual Training Activity - Due to travel restrictions between Australia and the Pacific the annual PITCA Training activity to be held in American Samoa in 2020 was cancelled. The ARC Nurse Consultants Group continued, however, to work with the CDC to support the National TB Programs of the northern Pacific through the monthly PITBNN meetings and activities. It is planned to resume the annual PITCA training activity in an online capacity in 2021.

Active Case Finding in Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia –

Chuuk, in the Federated States of Micronesia, has amongst the highest rates and burden of TB in the Pacific. It has been identified that current screening and management strategies within Chuuk are not effectively progressing the TB elimination agenda.

Based on the success of the Active Case Finding Project undertaken in the Marshall Islands in 2017-2019, a project team lead by Dr Richard Brostrom from the CDC Hawaii in collaboration with the Federated States of Micronesia, Ministry of Health planned to undertake an Active Case Finding activity for the island population of Chuuk. The ARC Nurse Consultant Group were to travel to Chuuk to work with the Ministry of Health and CDC to develop and deliver in-country training for the screening teams, work with the local teams to identify new TB cases and people with latent TB infection and implement case management practices. This work has been delayed due to the pandemic and travel restrictions within the Pacific. The project is rescheduled to commence in 2021 when travel restrictions cease.

Cough and Premature Death in the Solomon Islands – ARC awarded funding in 2020 to Dr Anthony Byrne, a Respiratory Physician from St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney to travel to Gizo, in the Solomon Islands to undertake a lung health project. The project aimed to increase case finding for people with TB and improve the quality of life of people in the Western province of the Solomon Islands through increased access to respiratory diagnostics and specialist medical treatment for coughing related illness.

Lower respiratory tract infections remain the single biggest cause of premature death in the Solomon Islands. The timely recognition of symptoms such as cough and fever by the patient (or caregiver), access to medical review followed by appropriate investigations and prompt treatment with antibiotics is critical to preventing these deaths. Unfortunately, cough is a common symptom and doctors are not available in many areas of the Solomon Islands. Diagnostic tests are often not available or are difficult to access in a timely manner. There are also non-infectious causes of cough such as asthma and COPD, which were also in the top eight conditions that caused the most disability in the Solomon Islands.

Dr Byrne and his team will travel to the Solomon Islands when the pandemic travel restrictions are lifted to undertake the project.